

PUBLIC HEALTH REPORT

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Comprehensive Health Planning in California

THE EXPRESSION "comprehensive health planning," should be looked at critically and its meaning carefully considered. The universe encompassed is really the size of the interface between the healing arts and the populace around them—the environment in which the health services are provided, the ills of the people and the way they express those ills, and the way the healing arts respond to the needs of the people. This means that planning must focus on that interface, but broaden its field of vision to include such diverse factors as the homes people come from, the effects of competition for living space and privacy, the means of paying for health care, and the resources for health services.

The "Partnership for Health" legislation that launched comprehensive health planning directs the health planners to involve large segments of community leadership. The law says the planners are not only those who call themselves planners, but also the representatives of the people and groups being planned for. Many who have not before considered themselves planners are asked to share the responsibility for planning.

This means the physician, the dentist, the optometrist, the hospital administrator—those who have been and in the future will be concerned with the provision of care. It also means insurance companies and educators, voluntary health associations and professional societies. Others, like the armed services, whose provision of care for servicemen and dependents is a vast enterprise, should be asked to participate in the planning.

The State Department of Public Health, as the state planning agency under Public Law 89-749, is assigned the responsibility to begin planning not only for its own operations, but for the statewide comprehensive health planning program. The Department has proceeded with a certain amount of caution and flexibility, because the first activities must include as many as possible of those persons with whom we share the responsibility for planning.

The designation of Planning Agency does not

suddenly relieve others of their responsibilities to maintain and improve their programs of health care. The Department can assist in some of the information and provide some of the materials useful for better planning.

The special knowledge of particular fields, such as the treatment of stroke or the effects of overcrowding on the mental health of the people in urban areas, must be provided by those who have the background and experience to measure and develop programs of services. The Department hopes to provide a forum and a format for planning.

Planning can be defined in many ways. There is planning for resources and planning for services. There is planning for the environment and planning for persons who have not shared in the full benefits of modern medicine. Planning at the state level is essentially a process of identifying alternative approaches to health problems, and permitting choice of the alternatives. There are limits to our capabilities and there must be a mobilization of the community to assure that the limited resources are utilized most effectively on the most important problems.

Because some problems extend beyond community boundaries, or community resources may be insufficient to resolve a problem, there is a need for area-wide coordination of local planning for action. The partnership begins to establish a framework for planning which recognizes the relationships of providers and users, community needs and resources, area-wide problems and statewide goals.

This framework provides the basis for decisions on limits to be prescribed for planning efforts. This process permits judgment by the State Planning Agency and the State Health Planning Council on the direction and achievements of action programs.

The interchange between the various positions within this framework for planning must be continuous and cooperative to create an effective partnership. Most of us have engaged in planning to some degree. Mostly we have planned a way to do a specific thing. We are now being given the opportunity to participate with many others in planning for comprehensive health.

*A new Director for the Department, Louis F. Saylor, M.D., was named 27 June.